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ABSTRACT

The Division H vice-president of the American Educational Research Association discusses organizational changes in the division. Division H concentrates on evaluation and development. Recommendations deal with governance, publications, credibility, credentialing, ethics, leadership, and membership. (MLF)

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Division H Vice-presidential Address

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What Do The Chickens Say Today?

The ancients found frequent need to consult with experts--hence the appearance in history of wise men, oracles and mystics. Roman emperors found experts who aided them in decision-making by reading the entrails of freshly slaughtered chickens.

The moderns have not lost the urge to seek consultant advice, and the science of such consultants may not be much advanced from the chicken stage. Practioneers and teachers of educational research, evaluation and related arts and skills have had some success in convincing decision-makers to use their knowledge and skill. However, it remains that significant decisions are made even without the benefit of chickens.

Division H was formed with a nucleus of people who recognized this to be a problem. Many of the organizers of the Division were school-based R&D practioneers; others were university-based persons with a school-oriented philosophy--that the schools are where the action is; that changes, to be effective, must be where the action is; and that an effective way to promote desirable change in school practices is to make available R&D skills in the school community.

Many school-based personnel scoff at the products of the university-based research community. The university seers produce answers to questions that haven't been asked, or, when asked to provide answers to questions of importance, find it difficult to give straight forward, unequivocal responses

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which are intelligible. Rather, the responses are often cloaked in the garb of a mystic cult, robed in statistical incantations.

As out-going vice-president, and fully recognizing the difficulties entailed in doing things I am going to recommend, I will outline a suggested platform for Division H, acting within the umbrella of AERA, to attempt over the next several years.

On governance--Many efforts have been made to study and change the governance structure of AERA. Some changes have been effected. Others, needed, have not. Some members have chosen to work through a known, existing structure, and make it work toward their particular ends. Others have opted out, finding the structure unwieldy and unresponsive. I have found the organization to be more responsive than I thought it could be, although slow and reactionary at times. The notion that founding a division to deal with our interests captured our imagination and energy, and became a reality. One of the few benefits accruing from this action is the guaranteed space on the annual meeting program, and representation on the executive council of AERA. It does not guarantee that Division H members will find more journal articles meeting their needs, nor does it guarantee that AERA as an organization will meet their needs. It is interesting that over 1/4 of the membership of AERA select Division H as one of their Divisions of interest. This, however, merely serves to confuse the understanding of what and who Division H represents. Instead of a clearly identifiable community of interest, whose names and affiliation reveal their interest, we now have a vast array--or disarray--of diverse interests. Many seek to reform us and make us into proper researchers.

As you know, all AERA members vote on all officer candidates. Thus, the vice-president of your Division, although selected by a nominating

committee appointed by the previous vice-president, is elected by vote of all AERA members. I do not believe this is yet a problem, but I believe it can become one, and would suggest that your new vice-president take a resolution to the next executive council meeting, recommending that division officers be voted for only by those electing membership in the division. I would further recommend that each divisional membership require the payment of an additional $1 above the basic AERA dues, payable to AERA, and provided to the divisions as additional funds to conduct division business. The nominal amount would not prevent many from joining, but may separate idle curiosity and random form checking from a deliberate choice to affiliate. Perhaps a more identifiable constituency will result. Although recent council action established a pro-rata method for providing funds for a division budget, these funds are not adequate for other than minimal activities.

Divisional vice-presidents and secretaries are elected. Each division has a program chairman, who is a major force in determining the extent of representation on the program, and in selection of papers and programs to be offered. The divisions also each have a student representative. Annually, a nominating committee appointed by the vice-president selects two candidates for whichever office is expiring. No other appointments are called for by the organization. However, the vice-president and the division can create whatever committees, task forces or positions they wish. I urge the division and its officers in the years ahead to use these means to accomplish several tasks, which I will outline.

On publications--AERA official publications do not generally reflect the existence of Division H or its members in the content of articles. There are many reasons. Some are that Division H type articles and

interests do not .et the criteria of the journals, the editors, nor those of the reviewers. There is a need for an evaluation and development type journal, serving school-based or school-oriented practioneers. Such a journal could be established by the division, with sponsorship by an outside agency, with or without official sanction of AERA. New publications are being encouraged by the AERA publications committee, and by the executive council. Professor Jim Popham made such a proposal in his paper (yesterday) entitled "Career Development for Educational Evaluators: A Case of Advanced Undernourishmert." I strongly urge the formation of an evaluator-developer journal by the division.

On credibility--Many, too numerous to mention without running the risk of omitting an important contributor, have joined the argument over what is a credible evaluation? and who are credible evaluators? The several sides of the issue all have valuable points to consider. One such position is that premature closure may exclude methods or people which are more credible than what we've yet seen. Another position is that evaluation is subject to charlatans and quacks. One reason for both of these is the often unique and proprietary nature of evaluation studies and reports. The research community depends on peer review to screen out or at least identify poor work. Evaluations are often not subject to peer review. Practioneers do not have a ready-made system for checking out their work, or for reading good work done by others, which could serve as a model. Often we are stuck with some idealistic statements of what a report should contain, or how a procedure should be carried out, with no way of knowing whether we've hit the mark. Our judge is most often the consumer, whose concerns may be more public relations or administratively-oriented.

I recommend the establishment, in addition to the previously mentioned journal, of a division senior review board, to be composed of recognized evaluation talents, to which division member evaluators can submit manuscripts of evaluation reports for critiques. This could be a monstrous workload and be totally unmanageable, but it could be a useful service contributed by senior members to the training and professional growth of junior members. The review board could select, on an annual basis, the top ten outstanding pieces of work, and the authors of those chosen then become members of the review board. Recognition would be given the authors at the annual division meeting.

All who submitted manuscripts should receive some feedback to aid in their growth and development. Selections could be made for publication in the journal, and input made to ERIC under a special category--"Reviewed evaluation reports," including the critique.

On credentialing--Credentialing evaluators and developers is a major problem. Some argue for credentialing by prescribed course work. Others take the position that credentialing should be done by competency tests. Still others opt for credentialing by product, and yet another school is the peer review process. I have no doubt that even more alternatives exist which are more or less viable. The division must foster the study of the credentialing of specialized personnel in evaluation and development, and must generate a feasible approach. Otherwise, the vacuum that exists will be filled by an agency over which we have no control.

On ethics--Related to credentialing is the ethics problem. AERA has had an ethics committee. Its work and recommendations have been, and will continue to be made to the executive council. Its concerns are with the professional ethics of all AERA members. We must be concerned with a

narrower perspective--the purview of Division H. I urge the establishment of a Division H ethics committee, the chairman of which would be recommended to sit on the AERA ethics committee to provide for liaison.

On leadership and membership: AERA and each division within it survive by membership. At the same time, increasing numbers of members can increase diversity, and further complicate the mission of the division. However, there are undoubtedly hundreds of persons engaged in the practice of evaluation and development in public schools who are not now members of AERA or Division H. These persons, as members of AERA and the division, would provide a grass roots strength for the division, and support for such actions as creating a journal. I urge you to establish recruiting methods on a systematic, geographic basis which will encompass such practioneers.

This will also provide a base for the development of my next recommendation, which is to establish a state-by-state organizational affiliate of Division H. Such state organizations need not be governed by AERA or the division. Such organizations would, however, draw support from local school districts and universities. They would work at the state level to encourage good legislation and discourage bad legislation related to evaluation and development. As many have indicated, state legislatures have enacted accountability type laws, some without input or sanction from those whose task it is to implement such programs. Presently, revenue sharing funds for education have not been forthcoming. However, it is very likely that the states will become the focal point for financing education or for allocating funds from the federal government for education. Most education related organizations do have state level organizations.

Few states, if any, have organized evaluator-developer organizations. Now is the time to move into this area, especially in the more heavily populated states.

My final challenge is to local school districts, state education agencies and the federal government. Far too often, services such as those performed by evaluators and developers are only allowed when they appear to be required to get other funds or when it appears to be paid for by someone else. In times of short-fall funding, such services may appear to be unnecessary, a luxury, and the service downgraded or terminated. This at precisely the time when good information on the productivity of funds being spent is more important than ever, and decisions are to be made on reallocating funds, or making program cutbacks. Do not cut back on evaluation and development budgets. Do weed out incompetents and replace with the brightest, most creative people available. Do not put an unsuccessful teacher or administrator in such a position simply to have a place to put them. Do train your own or recruit well-trained, and/or experienced personnel.

It has been a professional privilege and social pleasure to have been your vice-president. I look forward to seeing the work of your new vice-president, Dr. Larry Barber, and your team. Thank you and good luck.